



AAC Publications

Ulvetanna, North Ridge, and Other Climbs

Norway, Senja

Senja island in northern Norway has been described as Scotland on steroids. Steep mountains with fairy-tale summits plunge straight into the sea. The maritime climate combined with Arctic Circle temperatures provide a host of winter climbing opportunities, and the island attracts a steady stream of adventurous mountaineers. Heavy snowfall makes mountain travel difficult in midwinter, and many enjoy climbing roadside ice.

I first visited in February 2019 to climb ice with Micha Rinn and was intrigued by the mountaineering potential in the spring, focusing on longer routes leading to summits. Mark Robson was keen to join me, and we arrived in Senja on April 11.

Mark and I were hoping for late-season Scottish-like conditions with fast travel over névé slopes and efficient climbing up gullies filled with snow-ice. Local guide Bent Eilertsen from Senja Lodge was intrigued and enthusiastic but a little skeptical. Sure enough, we had not allowed for the sun rising higher in the sky than in Scotland and the consequent rapid deterioration of snow conditions. Early in the trip, we dodged consistent avalanche danger while climbing new routes up the east ridge (Eagle Ridge, Scottish IV,4) of Steinsethogda (473m) and the Eastern Ramp (IV,4) of Litjebrusen (532m). Both were enjoyable 300m mixed routes, but they were not quite the objectives we were seeking.

Our opportunity finally came on April 23, the last full day of our trip. After a week of warm weather, the temperature had plummeted, bringing the higher mountains back into condition. We opted for the 500m-high north ridge of Ulvetanna (ca 800m), a subsummit due west of Stormoa (974m), the second-highest mountain on the island. [The name Ulvetanna was given by Eilertsen; the peak is not named on the map.]

The climbing was straightforward at first. As the ridge narrowed, we encountered steep mixed sections between horizontal pitches of narrow and sometimes corniced ridge. The snow was softening in the sun on the east flank, but the shady west side still held deep, unconsolidated powder. The only way forward was to follow the exact crest as it reared up into an ever-steepening prow. The crux was the penultimate pitch, where the crest became a vertical prow of compact rock. It looked impossible from below, but a hidden 15m crack led through the steepest section, followed by a scary 20m runout on widely spaced turf placements.

When we reached the tiny summit and looked down into the avalanche-ridden Stormoa basin, we knew we had no option but to carefully abseil down the way we had come. We rated the route Scottish VI,6—a grade that captures the uncertainty and insecurity of the terrain, like the big, thin face routes on Ben Nevis such as Galactic Hitchhiker. That evening Bent told us Ulvetanna had only been climbed once before, via the west ridge, just three summers earlier. Our quest for good springtime climbing conditions on Senja had not been completely successful, but if nothing else it demonstrates the vast possibility for adventurous mountaineering on the island.

— Simon Richardson, Scotland

Images



Looking up the north ridge of Ulvetanna as the angle starts to steepen. Tricky snow conditions on either side of the ridge forced the climbers to stay right on the crest.



Looking down the north ridge of Ulvetanna.



Mark Robson climbing the final pitch to the summit of Ulvetanna, relieved to find more conventional Scottish-type terrain at this point.



Simon Richardson traversing the lower north ridge of Ulvetanna. Hesten (865m) is in the background.

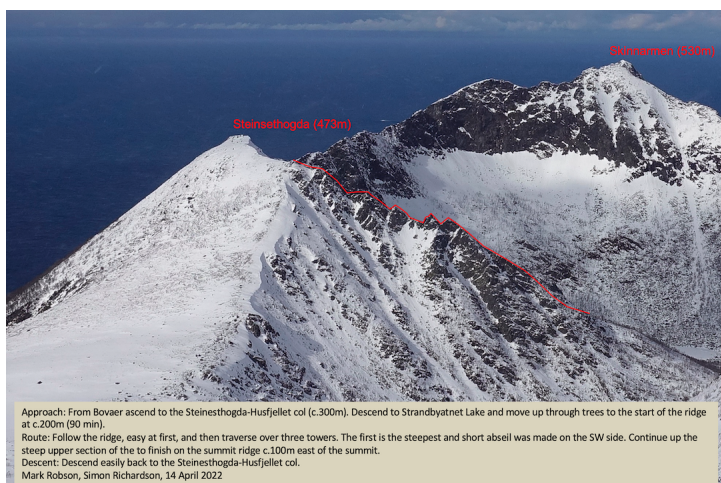


Photo-topo of the Eagle Ridge on Steinsethogda.

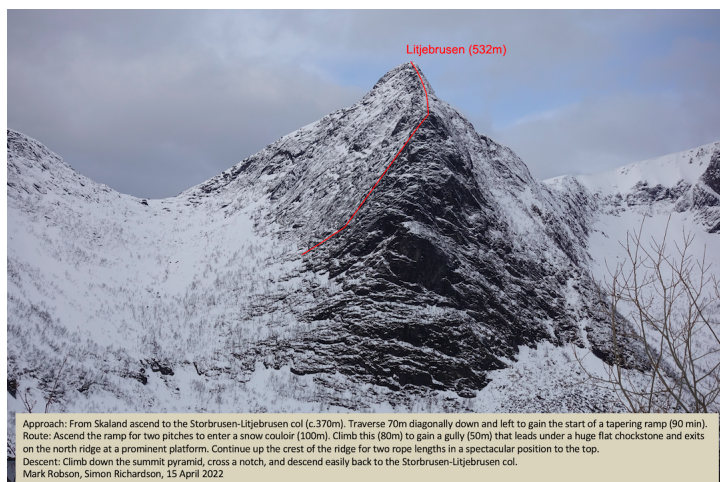


Photo-topo of the Eastern Ramp of Litjebrusen.

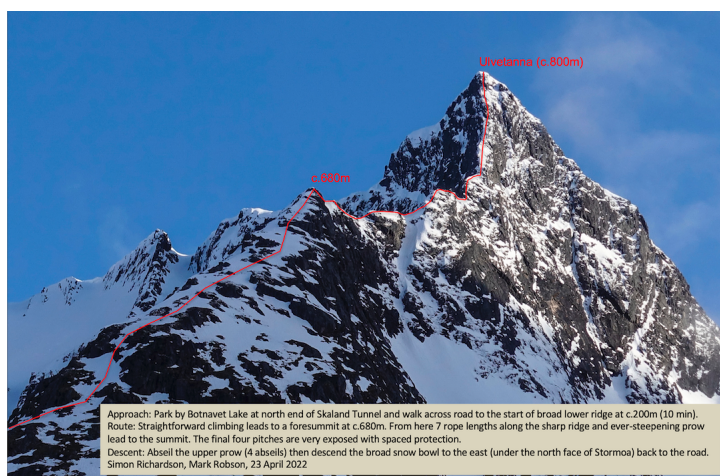


Photo-topo of the north ridge of Ulvetanna on Senja, Norway.

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